

## **Editorial: The Economic Voter and The Economic Crisis**

*Acta Politica, accepted.*

### **SUMMARY**

Theories of economic voting have a long tradition in political science and continue to inspire a large group of scholars. Classical economic voting theory assumes a reward-and-punishment mechanism (Key, 1966). This mechanism implies that incumbents are more likely to stay in power under a good economy, but are cast out under a bad economy (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000). The economy has repeatedly been shown to be a major determinant of electoral behavior (see especially the recent book by Duch and Stevenson, 2008), but the current economic crisis seems to provide a marked illustration of how the economy affects voting. In recent elections across the Western industrialized world, most ruling coalitions lost their majority. Opposition parties, on the other hand, whether right wing or left wing, have appeared to benefit from the economic downturn.

The clear pattern of voters punishing their government during the current economic crisis does raise the question whether the impact of the economy on vote choices has increased over the past decades. The observed weakening of party identification across established democracies does provide a possible explanation for the economy to have become a more important vote choice

predictor (Kayser and Wlezien, 2011). Concurrently with a decrease of partisanship, however, processes of globalization and Europeanization have been taken place. These evolutions can be argued to have decreased the clarity of responsibility for managing the economy; therefore it has become less clear for voters whom to credit or blame for economic performance. The process of globalization, in itself, could have caused the economic vote to become less important at a national level (Hellwig, 2001).

The current economic crisis, then, is taking place in a context of decreased partisanship on the one hand and increased globalization on the other. As such, the crisis provides clear challenges for economic voting theories. Research work relating the economic crisis to elections has tended to focus on the countries hardest hit, such as those of southern Europe (see, for example, the collection of papers edited by Bellucci, Costa Lobo, and Lewis-Beck, 2012). But, the crisis clearly has an impact that crosses other borders. The current special issue aims to tackle these challenges by bringing together research that addresses the question of how the economy affects voting behavior in during economic crisis in diverse contexts. The papers presented in this special issue were originally presented in the workshop ‘What Happened to Incumbency Voting?’, organized at the Center for Citizenship and Democracy of the University of Leuven (22 November 2012).

With the exception of the first article, which presents a comparative macro-perspective of economic voting, each of the contributions presents a separate case study. The case studies offer thorough analyses of economic voting in the Finnish (2011), the Polish (2011), the Greek (2012) and the Canadian (2008 and 2011) elections. As a result, this collection of papers provides insights into the mechanism of economic voting in a context of crisis for a set of countries that is both geographically as well as economically diverse. Each of the contributions shows evidence of economic effects. Given the diversity of the set of countries investigated, in terms of the state of the economy or the length of a democratic tradition, this can be called remarkable.

(...)

This diverse set of papers makes clear that besides pointing out the relevance of economic voting, an economic crisis also poses some serious challenges to scholars of economic voting. Each in their own way, however, show how the economic voter manages to work through these problems.

As a result, the contributions included in this special issue not only provide indications of the generalizability of the theory of economic voting to diverse contexts, but they also shed new light on how the economy affects voting behavior in a context of crisis.

## References

Bellucci, P., Costa Lobo, M. and Lewis-Beck, M.S, editors (2012). Economic Crisis and Elections: the European Periphery, special symposium. *Electoral Studies* 33(3).

Duch, R. M. and Stevenson, R. T. (2008). *The Economic Vote. How Political and Economic Institutions Condition Election Results*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hellwig, T. (2001). Interdependence, Government Constraints, and Economic Voting. *The Journal of Politics* 63(4): 1141-1162.

Kayser, M. and Peress, M. (2012). Benchmarking across Borders: Electoral Accountability and the Necessity of Comparison. *American Political Science Review* 106(3): 661-84.

Kayser, M.A. and Wlezien, C. (2011). Performance Pressure: Patterns of Partisanship and the Economic Vote. *European Journal of Political Research* 50(3): 365-394.

Key, V.O. (1966). *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting 1936-1966*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Lewis-Beck, M.S. and Stegmaier, M. (2000). Economic Determinants of Electoral Outcomes. *Annual Review of Political Science* 3(1): 183-219.